The Tangled Roots of Calvinism

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Introduction

Understanding the root system of trees can save property owners both time and money.

In the Fall of 2017, Hurricane Irma hit Florida causing significant property damage throughout the state. Thankfully, our property here in Central Florida was spared the worst of the damages. However, some of our residents were without water for a while because of a fallen tree. The tree's root system was wrapped around a water line. When that tree fell, it broke a main line that supplied water to the residents on that block. After repairs were made, the folks living there were under a "boil water order" because of possible contamination to the water. Had the residents there known about the root system of that tree, measures could have been taken to avoid the damage caused by the fallen tree.

Root systems are important not only in the physical world, but also in the realm of theology. Tracing the historical roots of Calvinism gives us a better understanding about the foundation on which this system of theology was built.

The Birthplace of Calvinism

Who started the theological system known as Calvinism? That question seems like a "no brainer." Since Calvinism derives its name from the Reformer John Calvin, he must have started it, right? At least that seems to be the common opinion of the so-called experts.

The Encyclopedia Britannica's article on Calvinism defines it as:

> "The theology advanced by John Calvin, a Protestant reformer in the 16th century, and its development by his followers. The term also refers to doctrines and practices derived from the works of Calvin and his followers that are characteristic of the Reformed churches."[1]

According to Joel R. Beeke, President of Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary, "Calvinism is rooted in the sixteenth-century religious renewal in Europe that we refer to as the Protestant Reformation."[2]

Despite common opinion, church historians paint a much different picture. The actual roots of Calvinism did not begin with the Protestant Reformation. The truth is that the roots of Calvinism go back 1,000 years before John Calvin was even born. Those roots are firmly embedded in the teachings of Augustine, Bishop of Hippo (A.D. 354-430).

Dr. Ken Wilson is one of the leading scholars on the life and teachings of Augustine. He received his doctorate while attending The University of Oxford in the United Kingdom. His doctoral thesis was entitled *Augustine's Conversion from Traditional Free Choice to 'non-Free Free Will': A Comprehensive Methodology*. Dr. Wilson states, "The 500-year-old theology of

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[1] Bouwsma, William J. "Calvinism." Encyclopedia Britannica. https://www.britannica.com/topic/Calvinism (accessed December 25, 2019).

[2] Beeke, Joel R. "The Origins of Calvinism." Monergism. https://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/articles/onsite/origins.html (accessed December 25, 2019).

John Calvin was directly derived from Augustine who strayed from the foundation of traditional patristic theology over a thousand years prior to Calvin."[3]

Paul Helm, a Reformed theologian, coined the term "Augustinian-Calvinism" for his view in the book "The Augustinian-Calvinist View" in *Divine Foreknowledge: Four Views*.[4] Obviously, Helm recognizes the connection between Calvinism and Augustine.

Reformed theologian B. B. Warfield said, "The system of doctrine taught by Calvin is just the Augustinianism common to the whole body of the Reformers."[5]

Even John Calvin, himself, attributed his system of theology to Augustine. Calvin wrote, "Augustine is so wholly within me, that if I wished to write a confession of my faith, I could do so with all fullness and satisfaction to myself out of his writings."[6]

Calvin quoted Augustine over 400 times in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. It has been stated that one of every four pages in Calvin's *Institutes* contains quotes from Augustine. Reformed theologian C. Matthew McMahon wrote, "Calvin, for this reason, would deem himself not a Calvinist, but an Augustinian."[7]

Without a doubt Calvinism finds its roots in the theology of Augustine.

The Origin of TULIP

The five points of Calvinism are often defined by using the acronym TULIP. Calvinism's TULIP took center stage at the Second Synod of Dort in 1618-1619 in opposition to Arminian theology. However, Calvin credits Augustine as the original architect of these five articles of Calvinism.

Dr. Ken Wilson explains:

> Augustine invented the five points of Calvinism that comprise TULIP: Total depravity, Unconditional election, Limited Atonement, Irresistible grace, and Perseverance of the saints. The most important of these was total depravity (with human loss of free will resulting in total inability to respond to God). This then required unconditional election (God unilaterally must give the gift of faith) and perseverance of the saints (since God's gifts are perfect). Irresistible grace and limited atonement were logical deductions from the three major doctrinal shifts.[8]

Augustine's development of TULIP did not happen overnight. It began with his understanding of the total depravity of man. The Church Father's prior to Augustine taught total depravity. But Augustine redefined total depravity to mean total inability. For Augustine, total depravity meant that lost mankind no longer had a free will and could not respond to God in faith. That was the first domino to fall in his development of TULIP. Since man no longer had a free will by which he could respond to God in faith, God had to give him the faith to believe. This required

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[3] Wilson, Ken. *The Foundation of Augustinian-Calvinism* (p. 1). Regula Fidei Press, LLC. Kindle Edition.
[4] Helm, Paul (2001). "The Augustinian-Calvinist View". In Bielby, James; Eddy, Paul (eds.). *Divine Foreknowledge: Four Views*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP. pp. 161–189.
[5] Warfield, Benjamin B. (1956). Craig, Samuel G. (ed.). *Calvin and Augustine*. Philadelphia, PA: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co. p. 22.
[6] Calvin, John. *A Treatise on the Eternal Predestination of God*. in Calvin, John (1987). *Calvin's Calvinism*. Translated by Henry Cole. Grandville, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association. p. 38.
[7] McMahon, C. Matthew (2012). *Augustine's Calvinism: The Doctrines of Grace in Augustine's Writings*. Coconut Creek, FL: Puritan Publications. pp. 7–9.
[8] Wilson, Ken. The Foundation of Augustinian-Calvinism (p. 2-3). Regula Fidei Press, LLC. Kindle Edition.

unconditional election which was the second domino to fall in the creation of TULIP. The third domino had to do with the perseverance of the elect. Not only did God give faith to the elect in order to believe, He also had to give the elect the gift of perseverance. Unlike the Calvinism of today, Augustine taught that a person could be given the gift of initial faith, but unless they were also given the gift of perseverance, they could be eternally lost. The final dominos in the line of TULIP were limited atonement and irresistible grace which completed the foundation of the five articles of Calvinism.

Augustine's Journey into Gnostic Determinism

Augustine was born in the Roman community of Tagaste. The town was located in a river valley about 40 miles from the Mediterranean in Africa. He was born into a family of a respectable class within the Roman society. Although money was tight at times, Augustine's parents provided him with a good education.

At the age of 11, Augustine was sent to school at Madauros, a town just south of Tagaste. It was known for its educational institutes and for its pagan influence. There Augustine became very familiar with Latin literature as well as pagan beliefs and practices. He was educated in Greek philosophies such as Stoicism and Neoplatonism. Unfortunately, some of these pagan beliefs remained with him even after he was converted to Christianity. According to his own testimony, Augustine gave credit to Neoplatonism for his conversion to Christianity. He was also influenced by Stoicism after becoming a Christian.

Augustine moved to Carthage at the age of 17 in order to continue his education in rhetoric. While living in Carthage, Augustine lived a hedonistic lifestyle. He frequently visited the brothels of Carthage and developed a relationship with a young woman named Floria Aemilia. For fifteen years, she was his concubine. During that time, she bore him a son named Adeodatus.

While in Carthage, he became a follower of a Gnostic religion called Manichaeism. He remained under the teaching of this sect for about 9 years. The Gnostics were determinists. They believed that every event occurring in history was predetermined. People were predetermined for either heaven or hell. Gnostics were also dualists. They believed that everything physical was evil and everything spiritual was good.

The Manicheans were considered to be the pinnacle of Gnosticism. They taught that there were two gods. One was a good god and the other was an evil god. The evil god created the wicked physical world. As a result, the physical body was evil, and the spirit was good. To give birth to a physical child was considered to be a sin since another evil human being had been brought into the world. The Manichean god, pre-determined that individuals before birth were either to be numbered among the elect or to be damned independently of human choice. In Manichaeism, the "enslaved will" does not have the capacity to choose. According to the Manicheans, the wicked physical world and the good spiritual world were in constant war with each other. The Manicheans taught that evil would continue to triumph over the material body until the soul was released from the flesh by death. Manichaeism allowed Augustine to continue his licentious lifestyle. The Manicheans taught that man was powerless to overcome evil while he was held captive by the material body. To Augustine, this explained why he could not control his sexual appetites.

Augustine Versus The Church Fathers Regarding Divine-Determinism

Augustine was converted to Christianity around August 386 A.D., at the age of 31. For the first 26 years of his Christian life, Augustine followed the traditional view of the early Church Fathers regarding the sovereignty of God and free will of man. The Church Fathers taught a general sovereignty of God. But they denied that God micromanages every single event of life down to the infinitesimal detail. They strongly opposed the deterministic doctrines being taught by the Manichean Gnostics. The Gnostic god of this pagan group was "non-relational." According to Manichean doctrine, this god unilaterally chose the elect for salvation and the non-elect for damnation based upon his own desires.[9] [10] The early Church Fathers who lived before Augustine refuted this deterministic view and condemned its pagan Gnostic origins.[11] [12] [13]

The connection between Gnosticism and Augustinian-Calvinism are unmistakable when the belief system of Gnosticism is compared to Calvinism's TULIP. For example, Dr. Wilson wrote:

> The essential element in order to be categorized as a 'Gnostic' is the belief that a rival evil god created the evil cosmos composed of physical matter. Gnostics were cosmic dualists, meaning that everything composed of physical matter was evil and everything non-physical (spiritual) was good. Humans are born evil because they possess a physical body. Therefore humans are damned at birth. Valentinus, a Gnostic, taught God offered the message of salvation to every human equally; however, only the predetermined elect were empowered by god to accept that invitation. The Gnostic god unilaterally restored right reason to the helplessly corrupted human will through a gift to the mind (Corp. Herm. 4.4; 6,68.36; 6,69.31–32; DH.5.3).[14]

The early Church Fathers taught that fallen man had a free will. They unanimously opposed the determinism being promoted by the Gnostics of their day. For instance, the Gnostics taught that Pharaoh's evil sin-nature made him incapable of salvation. Therefore, the god of Gnosticism had to first regenerate a person before they could believe. Origen wrote a rebuttal (Princ.3.1.8) in which he defended free choice in contrast to the Gnostic teaching of Divine-Determinism.

With one voice, the early Church Fathers opposed the Gnostic doctrine of Divine-Determinism. They felt that this deterministic teaching stripped mankind of free choice. Even worse, the determinism of the Gnostics deprived many, if not most, of the universal opportunity for salvation. Irenaeus opposed Gnostic determinism and compared it to Stoic determinism (Adv. haer.1.6.2; 2.29.1–31; 2.14.4).

Clement of Alexandria opposed the Gnostic teaching that claimed faith was a gift of God. The Gnostics taught that certain persons were not capable of believing because they did not receive the gift of faith (Strom.2.3–4).

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[9] O'Donnell, James (2005). *Augustine: A New Biography*. New York, NY: HarperCollins. pp. 45, 48.

[10] Chadwick, Henry (1986). *Augustine: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press. p. 14.

[11] McIntire, C.T. (2005). "Free Will and Predestination: Christian Concepts". In Jones, Lindsay (ed.). *The Encyclopedia of Religion*. **5** (2 ed.). Farmington Hills, MI: Macmillan Reference USA. pp. 3206–3209.

[12] Chadwick, Henry (1966). *Early Christian Thought and the Classical Tradition*. Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press. p. 9.

[13] Chadwick, Henry (1983). "Freedom and Necessity in Early Christian Thought About God". In Tracy, David; Lash, Nicholas (eds.). *Cosmology and Theology*. Edinburgh: T and T Clark. pp. 8–13.

[14] Wilson, Ken. *The Foundation of Augustinian-Calvinism* (pp. 11-12). Regula Fidei Press, LLC. Kindle Edition.

According to Clement, the Gnostics used passages of scripture, such as Romans 11, as proof texts to support their deterministic doctrines (Exc. Theod. 56.3–27).

The early Church Fathers did teach a type of predetermination regarding the eternal destinies of individuals. However, that predetermination was based upon God's foreknowledge of the decisions of men. What they opposed was the unilateral determinism of Stoicism, Gnosticism, and Manichaeism. While the early Church Fathers taught predestination, they refuted Divine unilateral predetermination of the salvation of individuals.

Dr. Wilson studied 84 pre-Augustinian authors who lived from 95-430 A.D. More than 50 addressed this topic. According to Dr. Wilson, "all of these early Christian authors championed traditional free choice and relational predestination against pagan and heretical Divine Unilateral Predetermination of Individuals' Eternal Destinies."[15]

> Not even one early church father writing from 95–430 CE—despite abundant acknowledgement of inherited human depravity—considered Adam's fall to have erased human free choice to independently respond to God's gracious invitation. God did not give initial faith as a gift. Humans could do nothing to save themselves—only God's grace could save. Total inability to do God's good works without God's grace did not mean inability to believe in Christ and prepare for baptism. No Christian author embraced deterministic Divine Unilateral Predetermination of Individuals' Eternal Destinies (DUPIED): all who considered it rejected DUPIED as an erroneous pagan Stoic or Neoplatonic philosophy, or a Gnostic or Manichaean heresy, unbefitting Christianity's gracious relational God. God's gift was salvation by divine grace through human faith (cf. Eph. 2:8), not a unilateral initial faith gift, as the Gnostics and Manichaean heretics were claiming. Early Christian literature could be distinguished from Gnostic and Manichaean literature by this essential element.[16]

When Augustine was converted to Christianity, he initially followed the teaching of the early Church Fathers, such as Irenaeus and Clement, regarding the free will of mankind. Augustine opposed the deterministic doctrine of Gnostic-Manichaeism in his early Christian life. He vigorously refuted the Manichean interpretation of scripture which was used to argue for determinism.

However, Augustine's theological worldview changed around 412 A.D. He adopted the determinism that he once opposed even though every church father before him taught that man had a free will.[17] When Augustine began to debate the Pelagians he changed his theology. He started teaching that mankind lost their free will.

According to Augustine, fallen man does not have the ability to believe the gospel of his own free will. Rather, God must first regenerate fallen man and then give them faith in order to believe.[18] [19] [20] But that in and of itself was not enough to guarantee final salvation. God also had to give the elect the gift of perseverance in order that final salvation might be attained.

[15] Wilson, Ken. *The Foundation of Augustinian-Calvinism* (pp. 104-105). Regula Fidei Press, LLC. Kindle Edition.
[16] Wilson, Ken. *The Foundation of Augustinian-Calvinism* (pp. 34-36). Regula Fidei Press, LLC. Kindle Edition.
[17] Wilson, Kenneth (2018). *Augustine's Conversion from Traditional Free Choice to "Non-free Free Will: A Comprehensive Methodology*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck. pp. 41–94.
[18] Hanegraaf, Wouter J., ed. (2005). "Manichaeism". *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism*. **2**. Leiden: Brill. pp. 757–765.

As Augustine debated the Pelagians, he used the same passages of scripture used by the Manicheans to argue for determinism.

> Augustine of Hippo's early influences from Stoicism, Neoplatonism, and Manichaeism ultimately determined his final theology, with his later deterministic interpretations of scripture reverting to his pre-Christian Manichaean interpretations. The key scriptures cited in modern defenses of Reformed theology are the very ones used by the heretical Manichaeans in the fourth and fifth centuries and imported into Christianity by Augustine. Numerous scholars cite these scriptures and cite Augustine as proof for the validity of their Augustinian-Calvinist interpretations. They remain unaware of the pagan Stoic, Neoplatonic, and Manichaean origins of these highly deterministic interpretations of scripture.

> The more one understands Stoicism, Neoplatonism, and Gnostic Manichaeism, and the more one has read Augustine, the more Augustine's dependence upon his prior philosophies and religion in his 412 CE conversion to deterministic "non-free free will" becomes apparent. The facts do not support the popular claim that reading scripture (Romans, Galatians, and 1 Corinthians) was the impetus for Augustine's deterministic conversion….[21]

Original Sin vs Original Guilt

The Church Fathers prior to Augustine taught "original sin." They believed that everyone born into this world has inherited the sin of Adam. In other words, all individuals are born into a sinful state.

In contrast to the Early Church Fathers, Augustine taught a doctrine called "original guilt." To say that fallen man is born into a sinful state and has inherited a sin nature, is much different than Augustine's concept of "original guilt." Augustine redefined the doctrine of "original sin" as taught by the Early Church Fathers. Rather than merely inheriting a sinful state from Adam, Augustine claimed that individuals inherited the guilt of Adam. For this reason, individuals born into this world inherited damnable guilt at birth.

Augustine invented this bizarre doctrine of original guilt in order to justify the baptism of infants. Since infants inherited damnable guilt when they were born, they needed some solution by which they could be saved. For Augustine, the solution was infant baptism.

The concept of "original guilt" versus "original sin" is certainly a complex issue. For more on that, see the appendix *Augustine's Bizarre Doctrine of Original Guilt*.

Conclusion

We have briefly traced the historical roots of Calvinism which undeniably lead back to Augustine. Unfortunately, Augustine was seriously influenced by paganism which resulted in Calvinistic doctrines not taught by the Early Church Fathers.

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[19] Bonner, Gerald (1999). "Augustine, the Bible and the Pelagians". In Bright, Pamela (ed.). *Augustine and the Bible*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press. pp. 227–243.
[20] Schaff, Philip (1867). *History of the Christian Church*. **3** (repr. 2002 ed.). New York, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons. pp. 789, 835.
[21] Wilson, Ken. *The Foundation of Augustinian-Calvinism* (p. 2). Regula Fidei Press, LLC. Kindle Edition.

The Gnostic-Manicheans were determinists who believed that every event occurring in history was predetermined. This concept led Augustine to develop a Divine-Determinism in which individuals were predetermined for either heaven or hell. While the Early Church Fathers taught the sovereignty of God in a general sense, not one of them taught the Divine-Determinism championed by Augustine. See the appendix at the end of this paper with regard to how the Early Church Fathers viewed the "free will" of mankind.

The Manicheans believed that the physical world was evil therefore all children were born evil. They believed that children were damned at birth because they were physical. Augustine adopted the Manichean teachings of regeneration prior to believing as well as faith being a gift given to the regenerated individual. This Manichean concept was the foundation upon which Augustine built his doctrine of original guilt. In order to justify the baptism of infants, Augustine taught that babies who were baptized had their original guilt washed away by the waters of the baptismal font. Augustine also taught that all non-baptized infants who die were damned to spend eternity in hell because of original guilt.

Most Calvinists today simply assume that their system of theology was founded upon the teachings of Calvin. They have no idea that the roots of their theological system sink deeply into the poisonous waters of paganism.

Appendix—Augustine's Bizarre Doctrine of Original Guilt

Introduction

In 2012, Dr. Eric Hankins wrote "A Statement of the Traditional Southern Baptist Understanding of God's Plan of Salvation." He represented a segment within the Southern Baptist Convention opposed to the classic view of 5-point Calvinism. In recent years, the teaching of 5-point Calvinism has made deep inroads into that denomination. The Calvinistic blogosphere went ballistic accusing the signers of that document of heresy. The Calvinists labelled these traditionalists as being Pelagian or Semi-Pelagian. At issue was the doctrine of "original sin." Or more specifically, the issue revolved around the confusion of Augustine's doctrine of "original guilt" which is often mislabeled as "original sin."

What is the difference and what does it matter?

Original Sin vs Original Guilt

The Church Fathers prior to Augustine taught "original sin." They believed that everyone born into this world has inherited the sin of Adam. In other words, all individuals are born into a sinful state.

Dr. Ryrie wrote:

> Theologians have used several labels to describe this concept. (1) Some call it, as the title of this chapter, inherited sin. This emphasizes the truth that all people inherit this sinful state from their parents, and their parents from their parents, all the way back to Adam and Eve. (2) Others call it the sin nature, which focuses on the fact that sin has corrupted our entire nature. The term "sin nature" provides a clear contrast between that root nature and its fruits (which are particular acts of sin). (3) Still others prefer the term "original sin" because Adam's original sin produced that moral corruption of nature that was transmitted by inheritance to each succeeding generation.[22]

In contrast to the Early Church Fathers, Augustine taught a doctrine called "original guilt." To say that fallen man is born into a sinful state and has inherited a sin nature, is much different than Augustine's concept of "original guilt." Augustine redefined the doctrine of "original sin" as taught by the Early Church Fathers. Rather than merely inheriting a sinful state from Adam, Augustine claimed that individuals inherited the guilt of Adam. For this reason, individuals born into this world inherited damnable guilt at birth.

In the traditionalist's statement, Dr. Hankins wrote:

> We deny that Adam's sin … rendered any person guilty before he has personally sinned.[23]

Historians tell us that Augustine had a poor knowledge of New Testament Greek. This resulted in several doctrinal errors such as his concept of "justification." According to Augustine, "justification" means "to be **made** righteous" rather than "to be **declared** righteous."

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[22] Ryrie, Charles Caldwell. *Basic Theology: A Popular Systematic Guide to Understanding Biblical Truth.* Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1999. Logos Bible Software Edition.

[23] Hankins, Eric "A Statement of the Traditional Southern Baptist Understanding of God's Plan of Salvation," SBC Today (May 30, 2012). https://www.efca.org/blog/understanding-scripture/southern-baptist-statement-gods-plan-salvation (accessed March 24, 2020).

In his development of "original guilt," Augustine relied upon the text of Romans 5:12 as it was translated into Latin.

Paul wrote: "Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, <u>because all sinned</u>."

That last phrase in Greek is literally "for that all sinned" (ἐφ' ᾧ πάντες ἥμαρτον).

However, in Latin the prepositional phrase "for that" (because) was rendered "in whom" all sinned. According to Augustine, death comes to all men because all sinned "in Adam." In other words, every human being was present in Adam when he sinned. And as a result, every human being received Adam's guilt because we all existed in him corporately. Therefore Augustine taught that every baby is born with damnable guilt which needs to be washed away by baptism.

Augustine's doctrine of "original guilt" laid the foundation to justify infant baptism.

Infant Baptism

During the early church, some practiced infant baptism. But that was the exception rather than the rule. Church historian Phillip Schaff explains:

> … during the first three centuries, and even in the age of Constantine, adult baptism was the rule, and that the actual conversion of the candidate was required as a condition before administering the sacrament.[24]

The earliest mention of infant baptism was by Tertullian (c. 160-220). He questioned the practice of baptizing infants asking, "why is it necessary?" Tertullian wrote:

> According to everyone's condition and disposition, and also his age, the delaying of baptism is more profitable, especially in the case of little children. (de baptismo, ch. xviii)

Origen (c. 185-254) felt that infant baptism was part of church tradition. However, he never explained the reason why infants were baptized. Up until the time of Augustine, the Early Church Fathers had no explanation as to why some infants were allowed to be baptized.

In order to formulate a rationale for infant baptism, Augustine drew from his Manichean roots to justify this practice.

As was mentioned, the Manicheans believed that giving birth to a child was evil. In their view, all physical matter was evil and was a product of the evil god. Therefore, bringing a physical child into the world was also considered to be evil. For this reason, the Manicheans taught that Jesus was not an actual human being. According to them, Jesus never experienced human birth. Therefore, the idea of the virgin birth of Jesus was ridiculous. Influenced by this teaching Augustine wrote, "I feared to believe the Word made flesh lest I be forced to believe the Word defiled by flesh."[25]

According to Manichaeism, conceiving a child in the womb and giving birth to a baby was to bring evil into the world. Not only was childbirth considered evil, but the Manicheans also taught that the child at birth was damned because it was physical. For this reason, the good god had to accomplish several things in order for the damned infant to be saved. First, the good god had to awaken the spiritually dead individual—aka regeneration. Then the good god had to infuse faith

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[24] Schaff, Philip. *History of the Christian Church Vol II* (p. 197). Revelation-Insight, 2011
[25] Sheed and Brown. *Augustine*. Hackett Publishing. p. 88.

into this lost being. In other words, this lost individual had to be given the gift of faith. With that accomplished, the good god would be able to resurrect individuals so that they could believe.

This Manichean belief system was the foundation upon which Augustine built his doctrine of original guilt. Augustine taught that infants who were baptized had their original guilt washed away by the waters of the baptismal font. According to Augustine, all non-baptized infants who die were considered to be reprobate and were damned to spend eternity in hell because of original guilt.

Augustine developed his doctrine of original guilt in order to justify the baptism of infants.

When Augustine debated Pelagius, there were a number of issues that were on the table such as free will, infant baptism and asceticism. Pelagius denied Augustine's strange doctrine of "original guilt" and he opposed "infant baptism." Pelagius was declared a heretic by the Council of Ephesus in 431. Pelagius got some things wrong. But he also got some things right. In fact, other contemporaries of Augustine also opposed his doctrine of "original guilt" because he had deviated from the teachings of the Early Church Fathers on that topic. Likewise, many theologians throughout church history have also denied the Augustinian doctrine of "original guilt."

Both Ulrich Zwingli and Martin Luther rejected the Augustinian concept that baptism removed the guilt of original sin.

E. Y. Mullins served as president of the Southern Baptist Convention, the Baptist World Alliance, and The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (1899–1928). Mullins also rejected the doctrine of inherited guilt. He argued that Adam's guilt is not imputed to humanity. Mullins explained, "Men are not condemned therefore for hereditary or original sin. They are condemned only for their own sins."

Millard Erickson was Distinguished Professor of Theology at Western Seminary in Portland, Oregon. He was professor of theology at Bethel University and also taught at Baylor University. He wrote 20 books among which was his widely acclaimed treatise on systematic theology. According to Erickson, Adam's guilt is imputed to a person only after he knowingly sins. For this reason, infants are free from Adam's guilt and God's judgment.

According to Augustinian-Calvinism, God holds men accountable for the guilt of Adam. But the God of the Bible does not.

In Ezekiel 18:1-4 we read:

> "The word of the Lord came to me again, saying, "What do you mean when you use this proverb concerning the land of Israel, saying: 'The fathers have eaten sour grapes, And the children's teeth are set on edge'? "As I live," says the Lord God, "you shall no longer use this proverb in Israel. "Behold, all souls are Mine; The soul of the father As well as the soul of the son is Mine; The soul who sins shall die."

God refuted the Jewish proverb by stating that individuals are held responsible for their own sins.

In the section that follows, He gave examples of His principles of judgment:

- A man who shuns sin and lives righteously shall surely live (vv. 5-9).
- A righteous man's wicked son shall surely die (vv. 10-13).

- An unrighteous man's righteous son shall surely live (vv. 14-17), but the unrighteous father shall die for his iniquities (v. 18).

Yet in verse 19, the people continued to oppose the pronouncement of God regarding individuals being held guilty for their own sins. They asked, "Why should the son not bear the guilt of the father?"

We have a similar scenario being played out today. On the one hand we have traditionalists that uphold the teachings of the Early Church Fathers on "original sin." Men like Zwingli, Luther, Mullins, Erickson and Hankins reject the idea that men are held accountable for the guilt of Adam. On the other hand, we have Augustinian-Calvinists that side with the obstinate Jews of Ezekiel's day and ask, "Why should the son not bear the guilt of the father?"

Today, many Calvinists assume that the doctrine of "original sin" taught by the Early Church Fathers includes Augustine's concept of "original guilt." What they do not realize is that the Early Church Fathers never taught "original guilt." Augustine was the one who invented this concept and Calvin adopted Augustine's teaching on "original guilt."

This concept of original guilt is one of the reasons that many Reformed churches baptize infants. Most Baptist churches reject infant baptism. And yet, Calvinists within the Southern Baptist Convention cling to Augustine's concept of "original guilt." They seem to forget that the whole reason Augustine developed the idea of "original guilt" was to justify the baptism of infants.

Here is my question for Augustinian-Calvinists in the Southern Baptist Convention: "Why don't you baptize babies?" You seem to accept the foundation upon which infant baptism was built and yet you reject the practice of baptizing infants. If you reject infant baptism, does that not make you just as much a Pelagian as the Southern Baptist Traditionalists of whom you accuse of heresy?

In my opinion, Southern Baptist Augustinian-Calvinists should be consistent. They should either baptize babies or give up the foundation upon which infant baptism was built. It's time to either fish or cut bait.

Appendix—The Early Church Fathers on Free Will

Introduction

For the first 400 years of church history there was complete agreement among the early church fathers that man possesses "free will." They taught that God is sovereign in a general sense. However, they did not teach that God micromanaged people's lives. The only ones who pictured God as a dictatorial micromanager of the destinies of mankind and taught against free will were the Stoics, Gnostics and Manicheans. Church historians tell us that there was no debate among the church fathers regarding Divine sovereignty and human free will until the time of Augustine. When has there ever been a time in Christianity when everyone agrees on a point of doctrine—especially a doctrine as controversial as sovereignty and free will?

Some Calvinistic Theologians, such as John Gill, have claimed that the early church fathers taught against free will. But when you read the actual quotations that they use, you find that they are vague at best. Often the quotations do not actually say what the Calvinist claim that they say. In fact, one Calvinist used a selected quote from an early church father that seemed to confirm his contention. But when the full quote was examined, you found that the church father was actually quoting from a Gnostic who was advocating determinism. The church father then proceeded to argue against the view of determinism in favor of free will. However, that part of the quote was purposefully left out.

The following are some quotations from the early church fathers demonstrating that they held to free will.

Ignatius (30-107 AD) was a disciple of the Apostle John.

> "Seeing, then, all things have an end, and there is set before us life upon our observance [of God's precepts], but death as the result of disobedience, and every one, according to the choice he makes, shall go to his own place, let us flee from death, and make choice of life.… If anyone is truly religious, he is a man of God; but if he is irreligious, he is a man of the devil, made such, not by nature, but by his own choice." (*Ignatius, Epistle to the Magnesians*, V)

Clement of Rome (35-99 AD) knew Peter and Paul personally. Tradition has identified him with the Clement who is mentioned in Philippians 4:3.

> "For no other reason does God punish the sinner either in the present or future world, except because He knows that the sinner was able to conquer but neglected to gain the victory." (*Recognitions of Clement of Rome* 111. 23, V. 8, IX. 30)

Justin Martyr (100-165 AD) was an early Christian apologist who produced works defending and explaining Christianity.

> "But lest some suppose, from what has been said by us, that we say that whatever happens, happens by a fatal necessity, because it is foretold as known beforehand, this too we explain. We have learned from the prophets, and we hold it to be true, that punishments, and chastisements, and good rewards, are rendered according to the merit of each man's actions. Since if it be not so, but all things happen by fate, neither is anything at all in our own power. For if it be fated that this man, e.g., be good, and this other evil, neither is the former meritorious nor the latter to be blamed. And again, unless the human race have the power of avoiding evil and choosing good by free choice, they are not accountable for their actions, of

whatever kind they be. But that it is by free choice they both walk uprightly and stumble, we thus demonstrate. We see the same man making a transition to opposite things. Now, if it had been fated that he were to be either good or bad, he could never have been capable of both the opposites, nor of so many transitions. (*First Apology*, ch. 42, p. 177)

"But this we assert is inevitable fate, that they who choose the good have worthy rewards, and they who choose the opposite have their merited awards. For not like other things, as trees and quadrupeds, which cannot act by choice, did God make man: for neither would he be worthy of reward or praise did he not of himself choose the good, but were created for this end; nor, if he were evil, would he be worthy of punishment, not being evil of himself, but being able to be nothing else than what he was made. (*First Apology*, ch. 43, p. 177)

"We have learned from the prophets, and we hold it to be true, that punishments, chastisements, and rewards are rendered according to the merit of each man's actions. Otherwise, if all things happen by fate, then nothing is in our own power. For if it be predestined that one man be good and another man evil, then the first is not deserving of praise or the other to be blamed. Unless humans have the power of avoiding evil and choosing good by free choice, they are not accountable for their actions-whatever they may be…. For neither would a man be worthy of reward or praise if he did not of himself choose the good, but was merely created for that end. Likewise, if a man were evil, he would not deserve punishment, since he was not evil of himself, being unable to do anything else than what he was made for." (*First Apology* ch. 43)

"But neither do we affirm that it is by fate that men do what they do, or suffer what they suffer, but that each man by free choice acts rightly or sins; and that it is by the influence of the wicked demons that earnest men, such as Socrates and the like, suffer persecution and are in bonds, while Sardanapalus, Epicurus, and the like, seem to be blessed in abundance and glory. The Stoics, not observing this, maintained that all things take place according to the necessity of fate. But since God in the beginning made the race of angels and men with free-will, they will justly suffer in eternal fire the punishment of whatever sins they have committed. And this is the nature of all that is made, to be capable of vice and virtue. For neither would any of them be praiseworthy unless there were power to turn to both [virtue and vice]. (*Second Apology*, Ch. 7, p. 190)

"…God, wishing men and angels to follow His will, resolved to create them free to do righteousness; possessing reason, that they may know by whom they are created, and through whom they, not existing formerly, do now exist; and with a law that they should be judged by Him, if they do anything contrary to right reason: and of ourselves we, men and angels, shall be convicted of having acted sinfully, unless we repent beforehand. But if the word of God foretells that some angels and men shall be certainly punished, it did so because it foreknew that they would be unchangeably [wicked], but not because God had created them so. So that if they repent, all who wish for it can obtain mercy from God…" (*Second Apology* ch. 141)

"But that you may not have a pretext for saying that Christ must have been crucified, and that those who transgressed must have been among your nation, and that the matter could not have been otherwise, I said briefly by anticipation, that God, wishing men and angels to follow His will, resolved to create them free to do righteousness; possessing reason, that they may know by whom they are created, and through whom they, not existing formerly, do now exist; and with a law that they should be judged by Him, if they do anything contrary to right

reason: and of ourselves we, men and angels, shall be convicted of having acted sinfully, unless we repent beforehand. But if the word of God foretells that some angels and men shall be certainly punished, it did so because it foreknew that they would be unchangeably [wicked], but not because God had created them so. (*Dialogue with Trypho*, ch. 141, p. 269-270)

"Furthermore, I have proved in what has preceded, that those who were foreknown to be unrighteous, whether men or angels, are not made wicked by God's fault, but each man by his own fault is what he will appear to be." (*Dialogue with Trypho*, ch. 139, p. 269)

"Here, then, is a proof of virtue, and of a mind loving prudence, to recur to the communion of the unity, and to attach one's self to prudence for salvation, and make choice of the better things according to the free-will placed in man; (*On the Sole Government of God*, ch. 6, p. 293)

"Every created being is so constituted as to be capable of vice and virtue. For he can do nothing praiseworthy, if he had not the power of turning either way.… unless we suppose man has the power to choose the good and refuse the evil, no one can be accountable for any action whatever." (*Doctrine of the Will* by Asa Mahan, p. 61)

"I have proved in what has been said that those who were foreknown to be unrighteous, whether men or angels, are not made wicked by God's fault. Rather, each man is what he will appear to be through his own fault." (*A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs* by David Bercot, p. 286)

"In the beginning, He made the human race with the power of thought and of choosing truth and doing right, so that all men are without excuse before God." (*A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs* by David Bercot, p. 271)

"Let some suppose, from what has been said by us, that we say that whatever occurs happens by a fatal necessity, because it is foretold as known beforehand, this too we explain. We have learned from the prophets, and we hold it to be true, that punishments, chastisements, and good rewards, are rendered according to the merit of each man's actions. Now, if this is not so, but all things happen by fate, then neither is anything at all in our own power. For if it is predetermined that this man will be good, and this other man will be evil, neither is the first one meritorious nor the latter man to be blamed. And again, unless the human race has the power of avoiding evil and choosing good by free choice, they are not accountable for their actions." (*A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs* by David Bercot, p. 271)

"The human race…from Adam had fallen under the power of death and the guile of the serpent. Each one had committed personal transgression." (*A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs* by David Bercot, p. 271)

"The whole human race will be found to be under a curse. For it is written in the Law of Moses, 'Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things that are written in the book of the Law and do them.' And no one has accurately done them all." (*A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs* by David Bercot, p. 271)

Tatian the Assyrian (110-172 AD) was a writer and theologian of the 2nd century.

"We were not created to die. Rather, we die by our own fault. Our free will has destroyed us. We who were free have become slaves. We have been sold through sin. Nothing evil has

been created by God. We ourselves have manifested wickedness. But we, who have manifested it, are able again to reject it." (*A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs* by David Bercot, p. 286)

"The Logos… before the creation of men, was the Framer of angels. And each of these two orders of creatures was made free to act as it pleased, not having the nature of good, which again is with God alone, but is brought to perfection in men through their freedom of choice, in order that the bad man may be justly punished … but the just man be deservedly praised.… Such is the constitution of things in reference to angels and men." (*Address to the Greeks*)

Irenaeus (120-202 AD) was a disciple of Polycarp who himself was a disciple of the Apostle John.

"But man, being endowed with reason, and in this respect similar to God, having been made free in his will, and with power over himself, is himself his own cause that sometimes he becomes wheat, and sometimes chaff." (*A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs by David Bercot*, p. 286)

"This expression, 'How often would I have gathered thy children together, and thou wouldst not,' set forth the ancient law of human liberty, because God made man a free (agent) from the beginning, possessing his own soul to obey the behests of God voluntarily, and not by compulsion of God. For there is no coercion with God, but a good will (toward us) is present with Him continually. And therefore does He give good counsel to all. And in man as well as in angels, He has placed the power of choice (for angels are rational beings), so that those who had yielded obedience might justly possess what is good, given indeed by God, but preserved by themselves…" (*God's Strategy In Human History*, p. 246)

"'Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good deeds'… And 'Why call me, Lord, Lord, and do not do the things that I say?'… All such passages demonstrate the independent will of man… For it is in man's power to disobey God and to forfeit what is good." (*A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs* by David Bercot, p. 287)

"Nor, again, does God exercise compulsion upon anyone unwilling to accept the exercise of His skill.… They have been created free agents and possessed of power over themselves." (*Vol. 1*, p. 523)

"But as the sun, that creature of God, is one and the same throughout the whole world, so also the preaching of the truth shineth everywhere, and enlightens all men that are willing to come to a knowledge of the truth." (Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, p. 331)

"…there is no coercion with God, but a good will is present with Him continually. And therefore does He give good counsel to all. And in man as well as in angels, He has placed the power of choice (for angels are rational beings), so that that those who had yielded obedience might justly possess what is good, given indeed by God, but preserved by themselves … If then it were not in our power to do or not to do these things, what reason had the apostle, and much more the Lord Himself, to give us counsel to do some things and to abstain from others? But because man is possessed of free-will from the beginning, and God is possessed of free-will in whose likeness man was created, advise is always given to him to keep fast the good, which thing is done by means of obedience to God." (*Irenaeus Against Heresies*, XXXVII)

"And in man, as well as in angels, [God] has placed the power of choice…so that those who had yielded obedience might justly possess what is good, given indeed by God, but preserved by themselves. On the other hand, they who have not obeyed shall, with justice, be not found in possession of the good, and shall receive condign punishment: for God did kindly bestow on them what was good…but [they] poured contempt on His super-eminent goodness." (*Against Heresies* 5:37)

Irenaeus wrote that God sent His Son "as one who saves by persuasion, not compulsion, for compulsion is no attribute of God." (*Epistle to Diognetus* 7:4)

Melito of Sardis (Died 180 AD)

"There is, therefore, nothing to hinder you from changing your evil manner to life, because you are a free man." (*A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs* by David Bercot, p. 286)

Theophilus of Antioch (Died 183-185 AD)

"If, on the other hand, he would turn to the things of death, disobeying God, he would himself be the cause of death to himself. For God made man free, and with power of himself." (*A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs* by David Bercot, p. 286)

Athenagoras of Athens (133-190 AD) was an Ante-Nicene church father. He was Christian apologist who lived during the second half of the 2nd century.

"Just as with men, who have freedom of choice as to both virtue and vice, so it is among the angels…Some free agents, you will observe, such as they were created by God, continued in those things for which God had made and over which he had ordained them; but some outraged both the constitution of their nature and the government entrusted to them." (*A Plea for the Christians* 24)

Clement of Alexandria (150-215 AD) was a Christian theologian and philosopher who taught at the School of Alexandria. He mentored Origen and Alexander of Jerusalem.

"A man by himself working and toiling at freedom from sinful desires achieves nothing. But if he plainly shows himself to be very eager and earnest about this, he attains it by the addition of the power of God. God works together with willing souls. But if the person abandons his eagerness, the spirit from God is also restrained. To save the unwilling is the act of one using compulsion; but to save the willing, that of one showing grace." *Salvation of the Rich Man* chap. 21

"Neither praise nor condemnation, neither rewards nor punishments, are right if the soul does not have the power of choice and avoidance, if evil is involuntary." (*Miscellanies*, Bk. 1, Ch. 17)

"Nor shall he who is saved be saved against his will, for he is not inanimate; but he will above all voluntarily and of free choice speed to salvation. Wherefore also man received the commandments in order that he might be self-impelled, to whatever he wished of things to be chosen and to be avoided. Wherefore God does not do good by necessity, but from His free choice benefits those who spontaneously turn." (*Stromata*, Bk 7 Ch.7)

"The Lord clearly shows sins and transgressions to be in our own power." (*A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs* by David Bercot, p. 288)

"Each one of us who sins with his own free will, chooses punishment. So the blame lies with him who chooses. God is without blame." (*A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs* by David Bercot, p. 287)

"'If thou wilt be perfect.' Consequently he was not yet perfect. For nothing is more perfect than what is perfect. And divinely the expression 'if thou wilt' showed the self-determination of the soul holding converse with Him. For choice depended on the man as being free; but the gift on God as the Lord. And He gives to those who are willing and are exceedingly earnest, and ask, that so their salvation may become their own. For God compels not (for compulsion is repugnant to God), but supplies to those who seek, and bestows on those who ask, and opens to those who knock." (*Clement of Alexandria* c. 195)

"Neither promises nor apprehensions, rewards, no punishments are just if the soul has not the power of choosing and abstaining; if evil is involuntary." (*Doctrine of the Will* by Asa Mahan, p. 63)

"So in no respect is God the author of evil. But since free choice and inclination originate sins…punishments are rightly inflicted." (*Stromata* 1:17)

"This was the law from the first, that virtue should be the object of voluntary choice." (*Stromata* 7:2)

"To obey or not is in our own power, provided we do not have the excuse of ignorance." (*A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs* by David Bercot, p. 287)

"We…have believed and are saved by voluntary choice." (*A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs* by David Bercot, p. 287)

Tertullian (160-225 AD) was an apologist for the Christian faith. He wrote a number of polemics against heretical teachings of his day.

"But although we shall be understood, from our argument, to be only so affirming man's unshackled power over his will, that what happens to him should be laid to his own charge, and not to God's, yet that you may not object, even now, that he ought not to have been so constituted, since his liberty and power of will might turn out to be injurious… Therefore it was proper that (he who is) the image and likeness of God should be formed with a free will and a mastery of himself;… At present, let God's goodness alone occupy our attention, that which gave so large a gift to man, even the liberty of his will." (*The Writings of Tertullian - Volume 2*, p. 92)

"I find, then, that man was constituted free by God. He was master of his own will and power.… For a law would not be imposed upon one who did not have it in his power to render that obedience which is due to law. Nor again, would the penalty of death be threatened against sin, if a contempt of the law were impossible to man in the liberty of his will… Man is free, with a will either for obedience of resistance." (*Ante-Nicene Fathers Vol. 3*, pp. 300-301)

"No reward can be justly bestowed, no punishment can be justly inflicted, upon him who is good or bad by necessity, and not by his own choice." (*Doctrine of the Will by Asa Mahan*, p. 61)

Hippolytus of Rome (170-235 AD)

"For man is able to both will and not will. He is endowed with power to do both." (*A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs* by David Bercot, p. 288)

Origen (185-255 AD) is regarded as one of the most important Christian theologians of all time.

"The soul does not incline to either part out of necessity, for then neither vice nor virtue could be ascribed to it; nor would its choice of virtue deserve reward; nor its declination to vice punishment.… How could God require that of man which he [man] had not power to offer Him?" (*Doctrine of the Will* by Asa Mahan, p. 62)

In his work *Against Celsus*, Origen responded to a claim that "whatever happens in the universe, whether it be the work of God, of angels [or] of other demons…is regulated by the law of the Most High God," Origen wrote, "This is… incorrect; for we cannot say that transgressors follow the law of God when they transgress; and Scripture declares that it is not only wicked men who are transgressors, but also wicked demons and wicked angels…When we say that 'the providence of God regulates all things,' we utter a great truth if we attribute to that providence nothing but what is just and right. But if we ascribe to the providence of God all things whatsoever, however unjust they may be, then it is no longer true that the providence of God regulates all things." (*Against Celsus* 7:68)

Alexander of Alexandria (250-326 AD) was the leader of the opposition to Arianism at the First Council of Nicaea. He was the mentor of Athanasius of Alexandria, who became one of the leading Church fathers.

"Natural will is the free faculty of ever intelligent nature, as having nothing involuntary pertaining to its essence." (*A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs* by David Bercot, p. 293, published by Hendrickson Publishers)

Archelaus Bishop of Carrhae (250-300 AD) held a public dispute with the heretic Manes — followers of Mani — an account of which he published in Syriac. The work was soon translated both into Greek and into Latin.

"All the creatures that God made, He made very good. And He gave to every individual the sense of free will, by which standard He also instituted the law of judgment.… And certainly whoever will, may keep the commandments. Whoever despises them and turns aside to what is contrary to them, shall yet without doubt have to face this law of judgment.… There can be no doubt that every individual, in using his own proper power of will, may shape his course in whatever direction he pleases." (*Archelaus Disputation With Manes* sees. 32, 33)

Methodius of Olympus (270-312 AD) was a bishop and author. He died as a martyr.

"Man was made with a free will … [with the] capacity of obeying or disobeying God. For this was the meaning of the gift of free will." (*A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs* by David Bercot, p. 292)

"Those [pagans] who decide that man does not have free will, but say that he is governed by the unavoidable necessities of fate, are guilty of impiety toward God Himself, making Him out to be the cause and author of human evils." (*Methodius The Banquet of the Ten Virgins* discourse 8, chap. 16)

"To do good or evil is in our own power". (*A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs* by David Bercot, p. 292)

Cyril of Jerusalem (313-386 AD).

"And you must know your soul to be endowed with free-will, and to be God's fairest work in the image of himself. It is immortal in as far as God grants it immortality. It is a rational living creature not subject to decay, because these qualities have been bestowed by God upon it. And it has the power to do what it chooses. For you do not sin because you were born that way, nor if you fornicate is it by chance. And do not take any notice of what some people say, that the conjunctions of the stars compel you to fall into unclean living. Why should you avoid acknowledging that you have done wrong by blaming it onto the stars that had nothing to do with it?" (*Catechetical Lectures IV*, 18)

"Learn this also, that before it came into this world, your soul had committed no sin, but we come into the world unblemished, and, being here, sin of our own choice. Do not listen, I say, to anyone who expounds 'If then I do that which I would not, in the wrong sense, but remember who says, 'If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat of the good land; but if ye refuse and rebel, ye shall be devoured with the sword,' and what follows." (*Catechetical Lectures IV*. 19)

Jerome (347-420 AD) was a contemporary of Augustine. He opposed Augustine on a number of issues including free will versus determinism.

"God has bestowed us with free will. We are not necessarily drawn either to virtue or vice. For when necessity rules, there is no room left either for damnation or the crown." (*Doctrine of the Will* by Asa Mahan, p. 62)

John Chrysostom (349-407 AD) was a contemporary of Augustine. He also opposed Augustine's view of determinism.

"All is in God's power, but so that our free-will is not lost… it depends therefore on us and on Him. We must first choose the good, and then He adds what belongs to Him. He does not precede our willing, that our free-will may not suffer. But when we have chosen, then He affords much help … It is ours to choose beforehand and to will, but God's to perfect and bring to the end." (*John Chrysostom on Hebrews, Homily 12*)

Conclusion

The Gnostics and Manicheans believed in determinism. To them, mankind did not possess a free will. The early church Fathers prior to Augustine strongly opposed this teaching. Augustine's teachings on Divine predestination find their roots in Manichean Gnosticism.

The Reformation's teaching on sovereignty and predestination was simply a revival of Augustinianism. In Calvin's *Institutes*, he says that all the early Church Fathers before Augustine were wrong about freedom of the will. He wrote, "Moreover although the Greek Fathers, above others, and especially Chrysostom, have exceeded due bounds in extolling the powers of the human will, yet all ancient theologians, with the exception of Augustine, are so confused, vacillating, and contradictory on this subject, that no certainty can be obtained from their writings."

The fact is that they were anything but confused, vacillating and contradictory on the subject of free will. In fact, they were absolutely unanimous on the subject. There is no textual evidence among the post-apostolic fathers prior to Augustine for the Calvinistic teaching of the bondage of the will (aka total depravity).

According to Calvin, the only ancient church father who "got it right" was Augustine, who lived 400 years after the fact. Those church fathers who were disciples of the apostles all got it wrong.

Calvin would have us believe that the Apostle Paul was such a poor teacher that his followers were totally confused about what he taught on free will. Supposedly Clement of Rome, Justin Martyr, Tatian, Mathetes, Ignatius, Clement of Alexandria, Irenaeus, Origen, Tertullian, and Athenagoras all misread the apostle Paul since their view on free will was diametrically opposed to Calvin, Luther and Augustine.

Many Calvinists today appeal to the Church Fathers in order to support their doctrines found in TULIP. Yet when you check out their sources, you find them quoting Augustine and ignoring the Early Church Fathers who preceded Augustine. Why don't they go back to the Early Church Fathers such as Clement? The reason they do not is because much of Augustine's "Calvinistic" doctrine was in direct opposition to what Clement and the Early Church Fathers taught.

Clement of Rome knew the apostle Paul personally. Mathetes was a disciple of the Apostles. Ignatius was a disciple of the Apostle John. Justin Martyr knew men who were disciples of the original apostles. You would think that these theologians just might have a little better insight into the mind of Paul than Augustine who lived centuries after the time of the original apostles.

Personally, I get tired of theologians quoting the Church Fathers in support of their doctrines. Scripture trumps the teaching of any theologian no matter what century that they lived in. But having said that, I tend to have more confidence in a Church Father who was discipled by the original Apostles, than one who lived 400 years after the Apostles left this earthly scene.

End Notes